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ABSTRACT

This document is a chapter in "The Principles and Practice of Educational Management," which aims to provide a systematic and analytical introduction to the study of educational management. The structure of the book reflects the main substantive areas of educational leadership and management, and most of the major themes are covered in the volume's 19 chapters, of which this is one. This chapter explores the concept of total quality and its influence on educational management and leadership. It focuses on the way in which educational management, like all other theoretical perspectives of organizations, is susceptible to changes in fashion. Prevailing orthodoxies change in response to a range of complex variables. Government policy, the publication of a particular text, and trends in the design and delivery of academic programs have all influenced theories in educational management. The development of management theory often resembles the medieval Christian church with its schisms, so it is important to balance dogma with analysis and provide a systematic review of the contribution of the quality movement to our understanding of educational management. The chapter discusses the evolution of the concept of quality and quality management and explores the problems in developing a definition of quality in the context of education management. It analyzes the experiences of educational organizations in implementing total-quality approaches and relates these to other models of education management. It closes with a discussion of some of the objections to the total-quality approach and a consideration of possible future developments. (Contains 14 references.) (RJM)

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Understanding Quality.

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Understanding Quality

John West-Burnham

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the contribution that the concept of total quality has made to our understanding of educational management and leadership. The chapter will first discuss the evolution of the concept of quality and quality management and will then explore the problems in developing a definition of quality in the context of education management. The actual experience of educational organisations in implementing total quality approaches will then be explored and will be related to other models of education management. The chapter will end with a discussion of some of the objections to the total quality approach and a consideration of possible future developments.

One of the key underlying issues in this chapter is the way in which educational management, like all other theoretical perspectives of organisations, is susceptible to changes in fashion. Prevailing orthodoxies change in response to a range of complex variables. Government policy, the publication of a particular text, and trends in the design and delivery of academic programmes have all influenced what might be described as the dominant hegemony in educational management. Although this hegemony will be continually challenged and will never achieve full implementation, any attempt to analyse the impact of a particular model has to recognise the importance of the status and credibility attached to a model and the extent to which it achieved the status of an orthodoxy.

The development of management theory often resembles the machinations of the medieval Christian church with schisms, alternative creeds, heretics and apostates all claiming to be true and denying the validity of other perspectives. There is little doubt that quality management in education became a movement with prophets and disciples (and heretics), and suffered from the zeal of the convert. This chapter will seek to balance dogma with analysis to provide a systematic review of the contribution of the quality movement to our understanding of educational management.

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The genealogy of quality management

The first significant text on the place of quality in education management is probably Plato's *Republic*. In describing the ideal education system, Plato was

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working from a clear and well-developed philosophical model which argued, in essence, that quality is an absolute, a metaphysical entity, that can only be understood by an elite, the philosopher-kings (a status still aspired to by many in educational management and leadership), and then translated into actual practice. Plato's influence on education systems, notably the British, will be discussed in the next section but his important and pervading notion was that of the possibility of defining and achieving a 'gold standard'. This notion of perfectibility, central to all the world's great religions, is a crucial underpinning to most debates about quality.

A second strand, far more prosaic, is to be found in the European enlightenment and industrial revolution. The scientific revolution produced, for the first time, the possibility of accurate measurement which could be replicated. It is easy to underestimate the impact of the standardisation of time, units of length and weight. The possibility of accurate measurement created the potential to replicate, and this was seized on by such pioneers as Josiah Wedgwood in the eighteenth century and Henry Ford in the twentieth century. The mass production of goods to a consistent standard introduced a new component, the notion of measurable quality.

The use of measurement to ensure consistent standards of production reached its apogee during the Second World War when the American munitions industry used a technique known as Statistical Process Control (SPC) to ensure consistent standards in the mass production of weapons. One of the key advocates of SPC was W. Edwards Deming and his role in the evolution of quality management is now legendary. The SPC technique was largely abandoned by American industry after 1945 but was enthusiastically adopted by Japanese industry with whom Deming worked as part of the post-war reconstruction.

The so-called Japanese economic miracle of the 1960s and 1970s is generally attributed to the evolution of total quality management – significantly inspired by Deming but with Juran and Ishikawa making important contributions to a management theory which had a substantial and profound impact on business practice. Importantly, the model had proven economic success, the dominance of Japanese industry in most areas of manufacturing was best reflected in the relative decline of those areas in most Western economies.

It is difficult to synthesise the components of total quality management succinctly but the key characteristics can be summarised thus:

- the centrality of the design process in order to ensure the product meets customer specifications
- the use of statistical process control to ensure compliance to specification in the manufacturing process
- the emphasis on prevention, 'right first time' rather than remediation
- the use of analytical and problem-solving techniques by the workforce to improve the process

- engagement with the customer to ensure continuous improvement of both product and process
- the creation of a team-based corporate culture with a high degree of consensus about organisational goals, purpose and processes.

Total quality management (TQM) thus combined elements of scientific management, a Zen-based belief in perfectibility and the sort of corporate thinking found in companies like IBM in the 1950s.

The 'secrets' of TQM were discovered in the USA in the late 1970s and there followed what can only be described as a scramble to subscribe to the new orthodoxy. The imperative to change was reinforced by the emergence of the excellence movement – best exemplified in Peters and Waterman (1982) *In Search of Excellence*. Total quality management and excellence offered broadly similar panaceas to the commercial ills of the Western economies and they were widely adopted and espoused by governments. It was only a matter of time before the evolutionary process saw the adaptation of TQM from manufacturing to service industries and from the private sector to the public sector.

The first significantly documented account of the application of the principals of TQM to education is probably Mount Edgecombe High School in Sitka, Alaska where the principal, Larrae Rochleau, introduced many TQM principles (Tribus, 1994).

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an explosion of publishing on TQM in education. In Britain, Murgatroyd and Morgan (1992), West-Burnham (1992), Sallis (1993) and Greenwood and Gaunt (1994) all produced books whose titles were permutations of total quality, education and schools. Significantly, all of these studies were essentially normative, each advocated a model of total quality for use in schools as an alternative paradigm – justified by moral imperatives rather than any research base.

The second tranche of publications, Doherty (1994), Parsons (1994), Lomax (1996) and Davies and West-Burnham (1997) all offered case studies of the implementation of total quality in schools and colleges in the English-speaking world. But these were largely self-selecting studies; all reported success in varying degrees and they tended to be written by the champions of the total quality approach in the school or college. There was no research base, no empirical survey and, crucially and fundamentally, no evidence that a total quality approach was in any way causally related to improvements in the school, college or system – however such outcomes might be defined.

The anecdotal evidence from industry in the USA and Britain was that total quality initiatives failed in 60 per cent of companies – no such evidence is available for education. It is therefore very difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions about the status of total quality in education, or indeed in management generally. The relative decline of the Japanese economy has raised doubts about the overall efficacy of the model in business. There is less activity in education

in Britain and the USA with alternative models, such as school effectiveness and school improvement, becoming dominant. However, the fact that this chapter has been commissioned indicates that the issue of quality in education remains significant: how significant will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Defining quality

The central tension in defining quality is best encapsulated in the philosophical divergence between Plato and Aristotle. Plato argued for quality as an absolute as discussed above, Aristotle by contrast defined quality in terms of behaviour. This captures the tension that permeates most writing about quality in education, the historical notion of quality as an ideal in contra-distinction to quality as a relationship. A good example of the former perspective lies in the use of phrases such as 'gold standard' to describe the British Advanced Level examination – it is at the pinnacle of the system. In this context quality is always perceived in a hierarchical way – everything is judged in the extent to which it shares the characteristics of the ideal. Hence much of the criticism of improving educational standards – they are only getting better because the ideal has been compromised.

Another example of the enduring impact of the Platonic model is the continual reliance in many educational systems of league tables, ranked measures of performance using quantifiable outcomes. This hierarchical and absolutist approach reinforces the notion of quality as a non-negotiable entity, of almost metaphysical status, which individuals and organisations can only strive to approach.

The quality movement, by contrast, has always rejected the notion of quality as an abstract entity. A number of aphorisms have emerged as the common perspective:

- 'Quality is what the customer says it is.'
- 'Quality is fitness for purpose.'

When elaborated in the various models, these precepts represent the profound shift that the total quality movement introduced – the notion that quality is defined by the customer's satisfaction rather than the supplier's intentions. It is difficult to overstate the profound conceptual leap that this represents; it is probably one of the reasons why the total quality movement has never really flourished in Anglo-Saxon societies. This approach challenges the perceived superiority of some universities and the status usually accorded private schools over state schools; it questions the notion that mastery of a prescribed curriculum equates to a quality education.

The quality approach argues that a quality lesson is one which children or students understand rather than one which teachers feel meet *their* criteria. A

quality lesson, school or college, curriculum etc. is delivered in terms of fitness for purpose, i.e. it starts with the learner rather than an abstract view of how things should be. There cannot be an absolute in terms of the quality of a car, a restaurant, a museum, a holiday or a novel. For each, individuals make a choice to suit their needs, wants and values. The enthusiastic advocates of the gold standard in education would doubtless be distressed if they had to accept somebody else's gold standard in their own lives.

This tension reveals one of the main paradoxes in the application of total quality principles to education. People do have a choice in buying cars, going to restaurants etc.; the majority do not have such a choice in education. In most countries, developed and developing, choice in education is a direct product of family wealth and/or social status. Universal, free education is still an elusive aspiration for most of the population in many countries. In most developed countries it is possible for the wealthy to buy privileged access to education, the same is true in many developing countries. A genuine choice does not exist in most education systems, the ability to choose is usually a function of the ability to pay. In this respect education is no different to any other aspect of consumer-based societies but it could also be argued that education is such a fundamentally important social process that it should be prescribed and defined, and not left to individual whim or wealth. Equally, children are not fully formed and informed customers, and so any attempt to define quality in terms of their expectations will inevitably be compromised and inhibited.

In many ways, this debate has been rendered marginal by the systematic educational reform that has taken place in most education systems in recent years, i.e the standards-driven reform programme. The increasing specificity of government policies and the introduction of performance-based accountability has limited the amount of discretion available to schools to implement quality-based approaches. In most respects, quality is defined by educational policy – and there is no example yet of a national government working to the principles of total quality. In reality the rhetoric of consumer choice is usually limited to constrained options within a system rather than guaranteed access and entitlement to educational provision which has parity of esteem.

Total quality in education

There is no consensus as to what constitutes a suitable model for total quality in education. One of the characteristics of the writers listed above is that they have all produced idiosyncratic models, although their pedigree is very obvious and the differences are matters of nuance. Thus West-Burnham (1992) tends to place greatest stress on the values basis of management; Murgatroyd and Morgan (1992) place significant emphasis on the techniques of quality management and Greenwood and Gaunt (1994) stress the importance of statistical process control.

However, the consensus view would include the following factors in any model of total quality in education:

- shared values, common purpose, i.e. mission
- a strategic perspective
- an emphasis on leadership
- team-based structures
- a focus on training and development
- clear articulation of standards and expectations
- systematic monitoring and measurement
- the use of techniques for problem-solving and decision-making
- integration of clients/customers into processes.

Expressed like this, there is nothing really distinctive about this list as it replicates many other prescriptions and formulations for educational management and leadership. It closely resembles long-established models emerging from the school effectiveness and school improvement movements, and there is nothing in the list that could not be broadly subscribed to by the most fervent anti-managerialist. However, this list represents only the warp of total quality – it is the weft that makes quality approaches distinctive and this can be summarised as:

- the 'total' approach, everybody involved in every aspect, all the time
- the emphasis on prevention, working to prevent rather than correct mistakes
- the importance attached to continuous improvement
- the holistic and integrative nature of the model.

It is this last point that marks a crucial difference to other models, management in schools is often a noun, describing a minority group. In the total quality philosophy, it is the activity of everybody. Quong and Walker, in describing a case study of a school in Hong Kong which adopted total quality management, argue:

> Total Quality Management then is a philosophy of management for schools that requires them to change both how they think and how they are. It is all about empowering the people closest to the client to make decisions about how best to improve . . .
>
> Total Quality Management in schools involves examining and changing traditional structures and empowering groups of teachers to make real decisions about the purpose, process and product. (Quong and Walker, 1996: 224)

Significantly, the changes described by Quong and Walker focus on structure and roles as the key to improvement. The school they describe was a private,

fee-paying institution – working outside the constraints of national policies and prescriptions. Although the evidence base is limited, it is possible to summarise a number of practical outcomes, reported by educational institutions involved in the quality movement, in the study outlined above:

- a new focus on values and strategic thinking, usually expressed in the formulation of mission statements, strategic planning and a greater emphasis on being 'values driven'
- increased emphasis on monitoring and review with greater use of quantitative data to inform analysis and decision-taking; this applies particularly to student progress and attainment
- standardisation of key processes to ensure consistency and adherence to defined best practice, e.g. admissions procedures and programme design with students applying to further education colleges
- the use of team-based structures for both staff deployment and the organisation of student learning
- greater involvement of students and parents through satisfaction surveys and the use of the outcomes of such surveys to inform policy-making, e.g. a middle school regularly sampling pupil satisfaction with subject teaching
- the use of external 'kite marks' to benchmark best practice, e.g. ISO 9000, Investors in People, Basic Skills Agency in the UK and the School Excellence Award in Singapore.

It is the emphasis on prevention that has perhaps been the most difficult area to come to terms with in education. Quality control and quality assurance are both well understood in the manufacturing context; it is easy to spot and reject a badly made widget – the same does not apply in the classroom. It is in this respect that the wholesale application of total quality to education becomes problematic. The early 1990s saw great enthusiasm for the international quality assurance standard now known as ISO 9000. However, it was usually only applied, often successfully, to management structures – not to relationships in the classroom. The notion of developing strategies to prevent failure in teaching and learning seems beyond any system – indeed, failure is often perceived as a necessary part of learning.

The issue typifies a key problem with TQM. It can be used to address the supportive infrastructure in schools and colleges but it has not been used to address the core purpose of education – the nature of learning and teaching. It is relatively easy to apply total quality principles to administrative systems, and this has validity. Many colleges of further education have applied the discipline of ISO 9000 to their support services with a significant improvement in efficiency and satisfaction. However, the movement from student records to student learning is a significant conceptual leap. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing any management structure is its ability to deal with those aspects

of organisational life which are not amenable to reductionist and instrumental definitions. In this context TQM may have the potential to offer a better understanding of the importance of processes, i.e. relationships, in the design and operation of schools and colleges.

In reporting the impact of the Next Generation School Project (NGSP) in Georgia, USA, Weller (1997) shows how schools involved in the project, using total quality principles, achieved significant improvements in student learning outcomes. In the project schools the number of students passing all subjects at the end of a year was significantly higher than for groups not using the strategy. There were similar improvements in terms of improved attendance and a fall in the number of reported disciplinary incidents: 'Seventh grade teachers emphasised personalised and small group instruction and continuous improvement. Students were told they could and would succeed . . . teachers had high expectations of success for each of their students' (Weller, 1997: 202).

It would be wrong to claim a precise causal relationship between the introduction of TQM and the improvement in results; there is a real possibility of a 'Hawthorne effect'. However, results did improve dramatically in the project classrooms and did not in others. It could also be argued that the changes in teacher behaviour were not exclusive to TQM approaches, the strategies are recognised good practice in any context. The issue is that change, and improvement, were the result of a quality management initiative. Weller is appropriately cautious about the long-term impact of the project but concludes: 'the application of TQM principles is showing positive results as schools are adopting TQM as a reform and restructuring process' (Weller, 1997: 204).

Difficulties with total quality in education

As far as can be established, there are no examples of schools or colleges which have adopted and sustained a total quality approach. Many have successfully incorporated aspects of total quality (see Davies and West-Burnham, 1997; Doherty, 1994; Lomax, 1996 and Parsons, 1994) but there remains the issue of the extent to which it is possible (let alone desirable) for educational institutions to adopt the approach.

There are a number of significant caveats about total quality in education:

- the tension between government policy-making and institutional autonomy
- consensus and professional autonomy
- managerialism
- the appropriateness of industrial models in education.

Although subject to the law, commercial organisations are largely autonomous when it comes to determining their management philosophy, even shareholders do not have to be consulted. This never has been the case with educational

organisations. They are subject to a wide range of external requirements which inhibit their ability to make significant choices. A pertinent example of this is to be found in England. A major bank, Lloyds TSB, introduced an important quality initiative in 1999. Based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model of quality, it represents a systematic resource for schools in developing a quality approach (www.qualityineducation.co.uk). Over 2,500 schools have been involved. However, it could be argued that the model will always be constrained by the policy context that schools in England have to operate in.

For example, a key component of the model is leadership. The ability of an individual school in England to develop its own model of leadership will always be compromised by the National Standards for Headship and the National Professional Qualification for Headship. In the same way, other components of the model, policy and strategy and processes, will inevitably be constrained by national initiatives such as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and the Key Stage 3 Strategy. This is not to argue that any of these strategies are hostile to quality but rather that they compromise the institutional integrity of the school or college – and such autonomy is fundamental to most models of total quality. The most significant compromising factor is that school self-assessment using the EFQM model will always be compromised by the national model of school inspection and by the use of national league tables. This diminishes the potential of the model as external inspection is in complete contradiction to any definition of quality management. Another example from England, although it is used in many other educational systems, is the imposition of a national scheme of performance-related pay – a concept not found in most total quality companies. It could be argued that total quality is impossible in the public sector unless a government adopts total quality – and that is close to an oxymoron.

The second area of concern is the perceived tension between the notion of professional autonomy in teaching and the insistence in total quality theory on high degrees of consensus, acceptance of organisational goals and working in teams. Leaving aside the moot point as to the professional status of teachers, there is obvious tension between the corporate alignment required by total quality and the historic autonomy of teachers. How defensible that autonomy is remains problematic as is the extent to which it is still true in times of increasing prescription about the curriculum, assessment and teaching strategies. On the one hand, total quality can be seen as anti-democratic, on the other hand, this is not unique to the quality movement. Once we move beyond the debate about real or contrived collegiality, every model of organisational effectiveness assumes a high degree of what Senge (1990) calls 'alignment' – indeed, it is difficult to envisage an organisation which does not require acceptance of values, core purpose and operating procedures. The perceived tension between the nomothetic and the idiographic, between

organisational and individual imperatives, is probably at its strongest in education. Indeed the claim to professional autonomy is often seen as one of the defining features of the concept of the educational professional, not least in higher education. While this can be seen at one level as a debate about academic freedom, it is also a pragmatic issue – how are those aspects of organisational life which are common to be organised?

Managerialism in this context is taken to mean excessive concern with systems and structures to the detriment of the core purpose of the organisation. The bureaucratic imperative is often cited as one of the main objectives to quality management strategies, and it is easy to see why. Thick folders of standard operating procedures seem far removed from the joy of learning and the creativity of teaching. The use of ISO 9000 undoubtedly led some schools and colleges into the rationalistic fallacy – if it is defined and documented then it will happen. In fact every educational organisation has always had standard operating procedures – curriculum documents and schemes of work, the staff handbook, etc. What often happened was that schools and colleges focused on quality assurance and neglected the other components of the total quality model. It is much easier to manage routine procedures than to provide the leadership to create a culture of continuous improvement.

The issue of culture is central to any debate about the application of TQM to education. Not only is there the issue of transfer across sectors there is also a major concern with what might be described as a new form of cultural imperialism. In discussing educational change in Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong, Hallinger and Kantamara argue that:

> An ever-expanding array of western management innovations are traversing the globe and finding their way into traditional cultures. Not unlike the response of a living organism to a virus, the instinctive response of many organisations is to attack with self-protecting mechanisms. Thus, even as policy makers embrace foreign educational policy reforms, change engenders more suspicion than enthusiasm. (Hallinger and Kantamara, 2000: 202)

It may well be that the only way that the principles of total quality will be fully incorporated into educational systems is through systemic cultural change, which is exactly the same principle as applies in commercial organisations. The example cited above from Georgia, USA, is a good example of this. Perhaps the most powerful illustration of this approach is to be found in Singapore with the School Excellence Model. The model is clearly value driven, giving practical expression to the principles of the national vision 'Thinking Schools, Learning Nation'. The key areas of the model, organisational effectiveness, student all-round development, staff well-being and teaching and learning, provide a systematic and integrated approach with clear criteria to be applied within a review framework. The model meets many

of the criteria for a quality approach but is distinctive in that it fits within an overarching national strategy, which is unique, and has been developed to fit specific cultural requirements; it has not been 'taken off the shelf'. Most importantly it has created a coherent vocabulary which is capable of informing action. It has status and significance and has the potential to deliver sustainable change.

Future developments

It is highly unlikely that the total quality approach will ever be seen as the panacea for all the ills that assail educational systems and institutions. Indeed, there is a major issue in debating the extent to which one approach is possible or desirable. The increasing specificity of government policy throughout the world points to a political confidence that it is possible to identify and promulgate the 'one best way'. However, in societies which are, at least ostensibly, pluralist and where the nature and purpose of education remain contentious, there may be validity in debating the nature of educational management as well as that which is to be managed. In this debate total quality offers a distinctive perspective which is derived from an explicit concern with translating values into concrete experience and stresses the status and significance of the perceptions of the customer or client.

The most significant issue facing educational institutions of all types is the extent to which the way they are currently organised, managed and led is 'fit for purpose'. This is perhaps the most powerful axiom of the quality movement in that it raises the issue of the relationship between form and function. It is worth questioning the extent to which roles, structure and processes in schools and colleges are actually fit for the purpose of educating young people to live adult lives in a world which, by any criterion, is going to be very different to the one in which the current patterns of schooling and educating were laid down. If nothing else, the quality movement offers a distinctive perspective and alternative criteria which might contribute to a complex and highly significant debate.

Further reading

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